

# Building Futures by



## Looking to the PAST

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History degrees can be misunderstood and undervalued. But Dr. Anna Zeide is leading the fight to change that with career opportunities.

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**W**hen Zeide joined the Department of History at Oklahoma State University in 2015, she accepted a unique faculty position that gave her a chance to focus on improving the undergraduate experience.

“When I was hired, we really wanted to emphasize undergraduate program development,” she

says, smiling. “One of the ways I hoped to do that was by developing career opportunities for our students.”

A history degree is often misunderstood by many outside the program — and even a few within it.

“History is often undervalued as a major because students or

parents have a harder time making connections between the content learned as a history major and the applications of that knowledge in the workplace,” Zeide explains. “I wanted to put students in places where they could use the skill sets and knowledge they acquired here, even if it wasn’t in specifically history-related careers. And



Students in the Jobs in History Practicum use classroom learning in their hands-on experiences in real-world settings, such as the OSU Museum of Art. Student Lydia Perez says, "This is, by far, the most interesting class I have taken at OSU." PHOTO COURTESY OSU MUSEUM OF ART

I wanted to help them develop the people skills so crucial to success in future employment."

Over the past few years, Zeide and the history department, led by Department Head Dr. Laura Belmonte, have recognized a growing need to better prepare graduating seniors for the working world.

"We found that some students were finishing with a history major and having a hard time figuring out how to translate the deep skills of researching, writing, managing information and critical thinking that they had gained into specific career opportunities," Zeide says.

To meet this need, she designed the Jobs in History Practicum Course. The course is intended to equip students with the tools needed to secure employment, and connect with other institutions on campus and within the community. By pairing outstanding students with local organizations for hands-on learning experiences, OSU history students have worked with the OSU Museum of Art, the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program, OSU's Special Collections and University Archives, and the Sheerar Museum of Stillwater History.

"They come in, they ask questions, and they are very dedicated," says Sarah Milligan of the OOHHP. "We look for curiosity, flexibility and passion: traits

that all of our History Practicum students have demonstrated. If it comes down to education versus passion, we will hire the applicant with passion every time. As long as the program continues to produce such high-caliber students, we will be more than happy to continue in the program."

In fact, one of the practicum students, Laurel Henagan, recently secured a paid internship position with the oral history project, due in no small part to the skills she acquired in the History Practicum course.

"Overall, I thought the practicum was a great experience," Henagan says. "The oral history office helped me learn a little bit about the whole cataloging process of the interview, really following it from beginning to end. Overall, I can't praise this program enough. It was the first time I had any exposure to careers in history."

Practicum students have been able to ground their classroom knowledge in the workplace as well as develop additional marketable skills. Along with time at their partner institutions, they also meet in class to read and discuss ways of identifying jobs that will fit their strengths, the value of experiential education, skills of networking and community-building, and specific paths into history-related careers.

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Throughout the semester, students write weekly journal reflections to process their work and gain instructor feedback, and conclude the course with an oral presentation that brings their practicum experience to a close.

"These students also get an opportunity to become an essential part of our educational programs," says Carla Shelton of the OSU Museum of Art. "They assist in giving tours, facilitate conversations with visitors in our galleries, and have helped run artists' workshops. We love having them take part in creating new curriculum and write lesson plans. They are always eager to help us come up with new ways to reach out to our vast audience, whether that be to our parents and their small children, K-12 students, college students or adults of any age."

"The program is built to show history majors there are other paths to take rather than going to graduate school," student Lydia Perez says of her experiences at the OSU Museum of Art. "This course is vital for people who are not sure what they want to do after receiving their bachelor's degree and also gives them field experience. This is, by far, the most interesting class I have taken at OSU."

"I am very grateful for all the opportunities this practicum course has given me for more hands-on history learning," Christina Schrantz says. "This will definitely be a class I will not forget. I think this history practicum course is a great class, and I think other students should be encouraged to take it or other courses like it. It offers a unique and important experience that is difficult to get for many students, and I am very blessed to have been able to participate in the course this semester."

The program is still in its early stages, with 12 students in total. With glowing reviews from both students and employers, Zeide and the OSU Department of History are looking to expand the programs.

"We at the history department have deepened our relationship with campus and community partners," Zeide says. "We are excited to continue to develop this course in the years to come." 🏛️

The Oklahoma Oral History Research Program (OOHRP) looks for curious, flexible and passionate students to reach its goal of preserving the oral history of Oklahoma for future generations. PHOTO / GARY LAWSON, UNIVERSITY MARKETING

